

‘Crown Her’ Proposal

In support of the provision of at least one free
sanitary product for all women in
Trinidad and Tobago

Executive Summary

On a worldwide basis, one in every two women lack the essential sanitary products due to their high costs. This inequitable situation, coupled with inaccessibility, has been made more apparent during this current Covid-19 pandemic. Many women are forced to search for alternative means, including clothes and blankets or unsanitary items in order to manage their inevitable menstrual cycles. To-day, unfortunately these women are forced to view these menstrual products as more of a luxury when it should be considered a necessary commodity.

One possible solution in alleviating period poverty and thereby contributing to positive female health is by reducing or eliminating costs associated with these feminine products. This, however requires government collaboration in eliminating taxes or ensuring at least one sanitary product be made free for all menstruating women.



EMPOWERED



This would involve, conducting a survey to determine need and cost associated with these products from various strata of the menstruating population, drafting of legislation to ensure this proposal is viable and sustainable whilst engaging the various relevant Ministries in ensuring feminine products are made accessible to all. While Scotland remains the first and only country to offer free menstrual products, other countries should strive to emulate their policies to ensure gender equality.

It has been shown that at least one free feminine or menstrual hygiene product will not only enhance physical health but will also positively impact on social and economic health as well. Women will no longer need to isolate themselves, compromise their physical health, avoid school or work due to lack of the necessary tools needed during their menses, budget or sacrificing from their earnings and therefore can conduct their daily lives care-free and participate with dignity.

Why Crown Her?

This is not the shocker; the 'elephant in the room' moment is recognizing that it is expensive to have them. Many girls and women buckle under the pressure of bills that come with handling their monthly menstrual cycles. The average female experiences approximately 500 menstrual cycles in their lifetime and according to international data and from personal experience can spend up to US\$15.00 a month to over US\$180.00 a year on menstrual products alone (G. Lee, 2018). This equates to over US\$6,500.00 over her reproductive lifetime (average range of menses 12 years to 50 years). Alarming, this cost is significantly greater owing to various other expenditure associated with having a menstrual cycle such as: doctor's visits, pain and acne medication and birth control use.

The Poverty Issue

Therefore, over a lifetime any woman can spend over US\$18,000.00 or more! (J. Kane, 2017). As such, the onset of menses means a new expense, risk of infections, and even days off school or work.



“Many girls and women buckle under the pressure of bills that come with handling their month menstrual cycles.”

For too many females, acquiring these products is a luxury and not a commodity.

Women constitute approximately half of the world's population and the cost of them purchasing menstrual products for multiple days each month for approximately 38 odd years eventually adds up (J. Valenti, 2014).

Even in the United States, a study conducted in the St. Louis region found that 2 out of 3 women of the lower income group could not afford feminine hygiene products (L.Carroll, 2018). The early onset of puberty poses an additional pressure on families in the purchase of these menstrual products.

Those who lack or unable to afford feminine products are often reported to skip classes, which in turn affects their long-term academic performance. Some women have resorted to skip some days at work or use sick leave in order to manage their menstrual cycles. There is indeed an entire medical specialty dedicated to many period related issues.

Questionnaires filled by women supporting the motion that free feminine products be made available gave different insights on how they would spend the money they saved. Some

suggested that they would channel the money to paying for a car, investing or becoming homeowners. They also offered different period poverty solutions ranging from the donation of extra products to food banks and homeless shelters to incentive grants for women by companies making feminine products taking the lead.

COVID-19 and Period Poverty

Most governments have failed to realize that feminine hygiene is a national health issue: a natural biological process that many females have limited control. With the onset of the Covid 19 pandemic, this pressure has risen tremendously with our struggling economy. It has especially become a huge expense for those families on the lower economic strata.

It should therefore be a crucial matter that should be addressed by government to assist our women. Menstrual products are essential and basic necessities for women and lack of access can lead to health issues, low productivity, and less participation with dignity.

How are women ever to be equal if at the onset of their lives and throughout their productive years they are on an unequal economic footing?

We commend champion Mr. Dwayne Bravo on his sanitary napkin machine initiative and the various non-governmental organizations such as Helping Her foundation and the PNM women's league for assisting in providing affordable and free menstrual products to our women.

Whilst, we applaud that these products are indeed VAT (Value Added Tax) exempted, we would however appeal to the Ministry of Youth and Gender Affairs, the Ministry of Health, The Director of Women's Health, The Office of the Attorney General and the Ministry of Social Development Trinidad and Tobago to ensure at least one feminine menstrual product be made available free.

Most governments have engaged this issue, with recently, Scotland announcing that it will provide menstrual products for all its women for free.

We refer to the Human Development Report 2020 that Trinidad and Tobago, has a Gender Inequality Index of 0.323 (which reflects the disadvantages of women in reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market). This indicates that despite increased female participation in government and greater educational advancement, women are not on par with their male counterparts.

This broadly translates into less opportunities and earning capabilities for women whilst having an extra burden of having to afford female hygiene products.

“Trinidad and Tobago, has a Gender Inequality Index of 0.323 (which reflects the disadvantages of women in reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market).”



Steps Involved

1. Determining the need for sanitary products and ensuring menstrual equity by conducting a prospective survey over a 3 month period. This survey/study would involve females using a specified age range from various districts throughout Trinidad and Tobago.
2. Submission of study results to the relevant authorities and stakeholders involved. The subsequent formation of a parliamentary subcommittee to assimilate the relevant information, determine feasibility including budget allocation and drafting of the necessary legislation to be debated in parliament.
3. Debating in parliament and subsequent enactment of the relevant legislation into the laws of Trinidad and Tobago.
4. Proclamation of the established law and dissemination of at least one free appropriate menstrual product to all females especially to those in the lower economic strata.

‘Crown Her’

Benefits:

- The female population will benefit physically and socially;
- The government will gain adequate information about its female citizens and aid in ensuring gender equality;
- The economy will benefit from the increased number of women investing in initiatives that would be otherwise spent purchasing menstrual products.

Potential Obstacles:

- Delay in conducting the prospective survey due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic;
- Potential females from lower socioeconomic groups unable to be included in survey;
- Delay in formation of the relevant subcommittee and drafting of the appropriate legislation;
- Budgetary allocation unavailable;
- Problems with dissemination at appointed relevant sites.



Problem Statement: “Crown Her” - a Non-Governmental Organization initiative spearheaded by The Supermarket Association, initiative member - Dr Nadira Rambocas partnering with the The Trinidad and Tobago Medical Association, Rotary Clubs of Piarco, Sangre Grande, St. Augustine and St Augustine West and The Greater Tunapuna Chamber of Industry and Commerce.

Women within the reproductive age (12-52 years) often face challenges related to inappropriate, inadequate, and unsafe menstrual hygiene and sanitation. This problem is exacerbated every month on average for 3-7 days. This comfort is unfortunately not available to 1 in 2 women of the world’s female population. Lack of adequate access to feminine

hygiene products due to their high costs has forced girls to skip school and women to miss work as they resort to managing their menstrual cycles. Subsequently, this has led to an array of negative physical and social impact on women, girls, and families alike.

Significance: The provision of adequate feminine menstrual products is a rudimentary need for every female in Trinidad and Tobago. The actual beneficiaries of this initiative will include the entire female population, the government, as well as the overall economy.

Proposed Solution: To support the provision of at least one free sanitary product for all women in Trinidad and Tobago within the reproductive age (12-52 years).

“Adequate menstrual products is a rudimentary need for every female in Trinidad and Tobago”

Proposed Execution

We recognize that implementation of free feminine products by the relevant authorities will involve a long process. We recommend that these be made available on the currently existing CDAP (*Chronic Diseases Assistance Programme*) to ensure that this process is amenable and feasible. We note that CDAP which costs approximately 11.2 million TTD (*Joint Select Committee Report, 2019*) and is managed by NIPDEC (*National*

Insurance Property Development Company Limited) that tenders for pharmaceuticals and whose advertised financial reports indicated a profit of 27.2 million TTD in 2019. Therefore, the introduction of at least one feminine hygiene product on the CDAP programme should be economically feasible utilizing our females' birth certificate PIN or National Identification Card.

“We are after all: your mothers, sisters, and daughters!”

We ask that the Government also maintain its provision of funding for menstrual education in schools to help our young girls understand their physical changes and proper menstrual hygiene.

Period poverty is a real issue and most women consider

menstrual products to be an unwarranted expense and often overpriced. Therefore, priority by the government for free feminine hygiene products should be made a priority especially at this time.

We are after all: your mothers, sisters, and daughters!



‘Crown Her’ Project Lead



Supermarket Association of Trinidad and Tobago, Project Lead:

The Supermarket Association of Trinidad and Tobago (SATT) represents the interests of the largest cross section of retailers nationwide including supermarket chains, independent supermarkets and groceries.

SATT's mission is to empower Stakeholders through genuine support and added value. In 2021, SATT executed the first Private-Public

Partnership for a Mass COVID-19 Vaccination Site and was responsible for vaccinating over 70,000 persons, that included employees from supermarkets, retailers, suppliers/distributors, corporate and the general population.

The Period Poverty Project is an initiative to empower girls by giving them access to free menstrual care as period poverty impacts education, health and emotional well-being.

‘Crown Her’ Initiative Member



Dr Nadira Rambocas, Initiative Member:

Dr Rambocas graduated from medical school in 2003 and is registered with Medical Board of Trinidad and Tobago and General Medical Council U.K. She worked at San Fernando General Hospital, Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, St. Augustine Private Hospital.

Dr Rambocas presently has a private office in Valsayn and in Medical Associates St. Joseph and Chaguanas

She possess a certificate from Montreal in Laser Studies, Postgraduate Diploma in Aesthetic Medicine, Master's in Dermatology in Clinical Practice, Postgraduate Certificate in Dermoscopy and is currently enrolled in the Postgraduate Diploma in Cosmetic Sciences.

Dr Rambocas is a member of the International Society of Professional Females and British Society of Cosmetic Scientists.

‘Crown Her’ Medical Lead



Trinidad & Tobago Medical Association (T&TMA), Medical Lead:

The Trinidad & Tobago Medical Association (T&TMA) represents physicians within this country across all specialties and locations. Our vision is to champion Healthcare Excellence in Trinidad and Tobago, and we seek to achieve this through our motto “Teach, Treat, Mentor, Advocate.”

We are pleased to have the opportunity to provide medical input to the Period Poverty Project as it focuses on the empowerment of young girls and women by improving their access to menstrual hygiene products. This task allows us to strive closer

to the United Nation’s Sustainable Developmental Goals of Gender Equality and Good Health and Well Being for All (Goals 5 and 3). The impact of women not being able to access what they need to help manage their menstrual cycle affects not only health and equality but also impacts on education, employment, economic sustainability of families and in some cases unfair social stigma.

In our role as Advocates for Healthcare Excellence, the T&TMA fully supports the Period Poverty Project as an initiative which will help our nation’s young girls and women take a step closer to closing the gender inequality gap and improving health.

‘Crown Her’ Partner



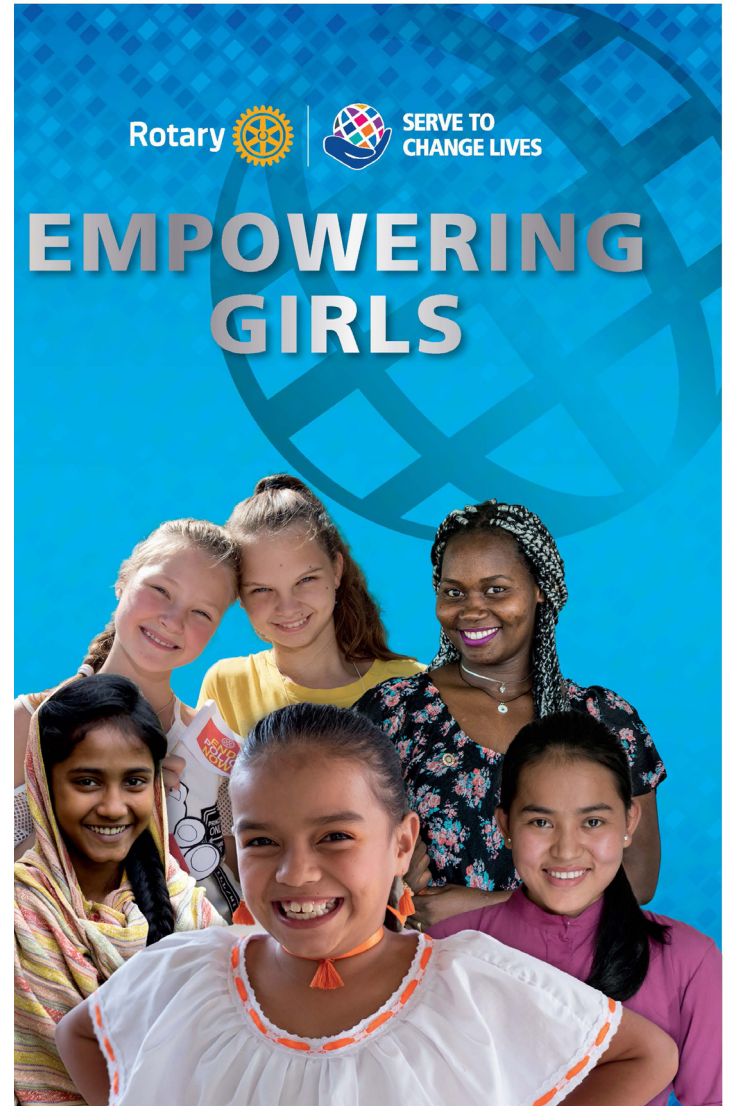
The Greater Tunapuna Chamber of Industry and Commerce, Partner:

While the main aim of The Greater Tunapuna Chamber of Industry and Commerce is to influence policies within the business community of Greater Tunapuna and to establish the region of as a business center of commercial success and high industry standards, we strongly believe in playing our part to empower communities not only in the region, but throughout

Trinidad and Tobago.

Our Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives range from youth in business, charitable programmes including disaster relief, environmental initiatives and the period poverty project in order to improve access for young girls and women. After all, ***“menstrual hygiene is a Human Right period.”***

‘Crown Her’ Partner



‘Crown Her’ Partner

Rotary Clubs of Piarco, Sangre Grande, St Augustine and St Augustine West, Partners

About:

Rotary is a global network of 1.4 million neighbors, friends, leaders, and problem-solvers who see a world where people unite and take action to create lasting change – across the globe, in our communities, and in ourselves.

Solving real problems takes real commitment and vision. For more than 110 years, Rotary’s people of action have used their passion, energy, and intelligence to take action on sustainable projects.

From literacy and peace to water and health, we are always working to

better our world, and we stay committed to the end.

Empowering Girls:

This Period Poverty initiative focuses on the empowerment of girls and under Rotary’s specific area of focus for Water, Sanitation and Hygiene, where Rotary Clubs execute projects that improve water, sanitation, and hygiene services, so that girls can safely manage their menstrual hygiene without sacrificing their education.

This would include, among other things, access to sanitary napkins.

‘Crown Her’ Legal Team (Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine)



Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine

Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine is the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Graduate Studies and Research, former Dean of the Faculty of Law, UWI, St. Augustine, and chaired Professor of Labour Law and Offshore Financial Law. An Oxford and Cambridge Scholar, she holds a doctorate in law from Oxford, LLM from Cambridge, LLB from the UWI and certificates in international human rights from the IIHR in Strasbourg. Antoine is an attorney, award winning scholar and author, international consultant, temporary Court of Appeal judge and activist. She was elected President of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Washington, the OAS

Rapporteur for Persons of African Descent and Discrimination, Rapporteur for Indigenous Peoples and Head of the OAS Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Unit. She was CARICOM Chair on HIV, Migration and Chair of the CARICOM Regional Commission on Marijuana. She is the President of the Family Planning Association, a Cambridge Fellow, a member of Trinidad & Tobago's Industrial Relations Advisory Committee, an Honorary Fellow of the International Society for Trust Practitioners (STEP), the only Caribbean person and a Trustee of the London IPPF Board.

Antoine made history by winning the regional Vice Chancellor's Award of Excellence twice, in 2006 for Research and in 2013 for Public Service.

‘Crown Her’ Legal Team (Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine)

In 2018 she was honoured by UWI Cave Hill Campus as an “Outstanding Alumnus”. She has published 15 books and numerous scholarly articles, with her work being described by international reviewers as “original”, “insightful and amazing”. PVC Antoine was honoured as an Eminent Jurist-Pioneering Caribbean Woman by the Caribbean Court of Justice in 2021.

Antoine served as Consultant to all of the governments in the Caribbean, UK, Venezuela, USA and Canada, the judiciary and international organizations, including the EU, OAS, IADB, World Bank, CDB, CARICOM, UNDP, OECS, UNICEF, ILO, UNIFEM, CAREC, PANCAP, UNAIDS, UNDCP, and ECLAC, drafting legislation and authoring in-

fluential Policy Reports on several varied issues prioritizing Caribbean legal development, including Climate Justice, Anti-Discrimination, HIV, Education, Narcotics, Labour Law, Human Rights, Free Movement, Financial Law, Health, Gender, Money-Laundering, Anti-Corruption, the Judiciary, Public Service, Police, Juvenile Justice and Human Trafficking.

This transformational work references the CARICOM Labour Law Report, the catalyst for labour law reform and non-discrimination legislation in the region, the Report of the CARICOM Regional Commission on Marijuana, CSME legal reform, the TCI legislative reform project credited with returning the TCI to self-governance and more recently, her CARICOM Report on

Marijuana, the blueprint for regional law reform.

Due to this path-breaking scholarship, activism and consultancy work, she is described by governments, international sources and others as the “foremost labour law expert in Labour Law in the region,” the “leading” authority in the region in International Financial Law and HIV law and a “change agent”. Antoine remains committed to development within the framework of human rights. She enjoys painting, gardening and is a trained classical singer.

‘Crown Her’ Legal Team (Varun A. Debideen)



Varun A. Debideen, Attorney-At-Law

After graduating with First Class Honours B.Sc in Management Studies in 2007 from U.W.I, Varun decided to pursue studies in law whilst continuing working at his family's business. Upon graduating in 2010 with his L.P.C from College of Law in London, Varun began his internship immediately upon return and subsequently was called to the Trinidad and Tobago Bar in April 2011.

Varun thereafter practised extensively in the areas of Human and Civil rights, Defamation, Contract Law, Public Law, Company Law and Public Enquiries to name a few. Some of Varun's work has been recognised by Amnesty International in its annual reports.

Varun has extensive experience with investigations and enquiries having worked with a team of

forensic accountants, IT experts and both U.K and Local Attorneys into various entities.

He was also appointed as one of the Attorneys to the Commission of the Commission of Inquiry into the Failure of CLF et al and Hindu Credit Union which ran for approximately 5 years. He has acted as both junior counsel and as Instructing Attorney to a few Queen's Counsel and Senior Counsel.

He has also served on the Board of Directors of the Chaguaramas Development Authority (CDA) from December 2010-December 2012 and on the Board of the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance (TTMF) from 2013- 2017 and served as chairman of its Asset, Liability and Risk Management Committee and its Tenders Committee whilst on the board.

‘Crown Her’ Legal Team (Varun A. Debideen)

In November 2015, Varun successfully opened his very own Law practice names “Bloomsbury Chambers” with its head office in the South.

At present he is also the legal advisor since September 2020 to a sitting Member of Parliament. His passion for law and justice extends past his success in the courtroom.

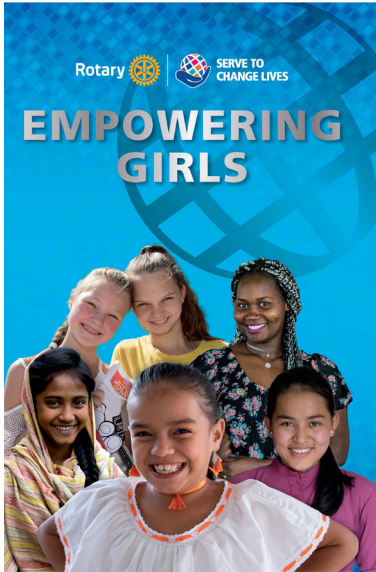
In addition to representing clients in a variety of corporate, criminal and IR, matters. He also provides pro-bono representation to those that cannot afford legal counsel. His goal is to forever ensure that everyone gets the justice they deserve.

Education:

- 2009-2010 College of Law, London, United Kingdom
- 2007-2009 University of London
- 2004-2007 University of the West Indies

Professional Qualifications:

- April 15th 2011- Admitted to the Trinidad and Tobago Bar.
- 2010 Legal Practice Course (Commendation) – College of Law, London, U.K
- 2009 LL.B (Honours) - University of London
- 2007 B.Sc. (1st Class Honours)– Management Studies - University of the West Indies



Launch: Rotary Empowers Girls Event:

The Crown Her Project will be presented at Rotary Empowers Girls Event on March 24th from 8:00 to 9:30 am (EST).

The March webinar is a formal event of the Commission on the Status of Women - the annual conference of the United Nations focusing on gender equality and women's empowerment.

Distinguished speakers will include Elizabeth Usovicz, Chair of the Rotary Task Force on Empowering Girls, as well as Dawn Rochelle and Tina Fischlin, the co-Ambassadors for the Empowering Girls Initiative in Rotary Zones 33-34.

Rotary Zones 33-34 includes: Mid Atlantic and Southeastern USA and Caribbean countries. Therefore, it covers Pennsylvania, USA to the coast of South America.



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Project Lead: The Supermarket Association of Trinidad and Tobago

Initiative Member: Dr Nadira Rambocas

Medical Lead: Trinidad and Tobago Medical Association

Partners:

The Greater Tunapuna Chamber of Industry & Commerce

Rotary Club of Piarco

Rotary Club of Sangre Grande

Rotary Club of St Augustine

Rotary Club of St Augustine West

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